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MODERN LANGUAGE NOTES.

Baltimore, May, 1897.

SPENSER'S CAVE OF DESPAIR.

*An Essay in Literary Comparison.*¹

PART I.

THE range of fundamental themes in poetry, even in the great epochs is at best but narrow. The literary echo pursues the student of Classical literature. In all the vast lyric of the Petrarchian tradition all that we find is some dozen essential motives: the Lover's Hope, the Lover's Despair, the Lover's Appeal, the Lover's Unworthiness, and the like. Even in our composite modern poetry, with its endless attempt at variation and novelty, the motives employed are susceptible of being resolved and grouped in a limited number of categories. As in the symphony so in the poem, the vocabulary of moods, from allegretto to andante, is easily mastered.

But it is in Mediæval poetry more than anywhere else that the fixed theme has its chief abiding place.² As Mediæval thought is narrow and perpetually self-involved, so is its poetry. Certain nature descriptions, as the

¹ In MOD. LANG. NOTES for Jan., 1890, there appeared an interesting and valuable article by Prof. A. S. Cook, presenting the passage from Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, (Bk. i, canto i, stanzas 39-46 usually known as 'The House of Sleep, together with a number of parallel passages from Classical, Italian, and earlier English literature, the whole affording the materials for a very suggestive study in comparative literature. In the following paper I have taken an equally famous passage from the *Faerie Queene*, which, however, runs back to purely mediæval and romantic sources, and which points to numerous later analogues and imitations. In the more important of these the resemblance to Spenser is rather one of motive and of poetical kinship, than of machinery and direct echo; and I have, therefore, thought it best to interweave comment and disquisition to a certain extent with citation and proof. The sequence of theme and of influence which I have attempted to demonstrate seems to me to be none the less certain and important because it seems less obvious and specific. The interest of the subject lies, perhaps, also in the instructive contrast and comparison afforded between two intense and typical utterances of high poetic romanticism, the one Elizabethan, the other nineteenth century neo-romantic, as well as in the development and history of a recurrent literary motive.

² See the interesting studies on the prevalence of the 'Ubi Sunt Formula' in Mediæval and Renaissance poetry, in MOD. LANG. NOTES, vol. viii.

springtide setting or the autumnal background; certain moral reflections, as the theme of evanescence and mutability or the text of 'carpe diem', certain set forms of visions and cavalcades and knightly combats are continually recurring.

Spenser, while the first of the great Renaissance poets of England, is at the same time the last of the Mediævals, and in his poetry we find repeated again and again many of the favorite motives of Mediæval poetry. He was an idealist, or more properly an idealizer, and a dreamer; his dream-world was built up out of the past, whether the past of Classical mythology or of Mediæval feudalism; his idealism was a peculiar product of the English Renaissance.

In one famous passage in the *Faerie Queene* (the passage describing the Cave of Despair and the encounter between Despair himself and the Red Cross Knight, in book i, canto ix), Spenser has elaborated and idealized in his peculiar manner one of the consecrated personifications of the Mediæval mind. After Spenser, and often with direct reminiscence of his treatment, other English poets have made use of motives similar to those found in this passage. In this paper I propose to trace some of the sources of Spenser's treatment, to analyze the passage itself, and then to consider some of its later literary analogues and sequences.

The great question of sin and salvation preoccupies the Mediæval mind, and forms the substance of its theology. From its theology it passes into its poetry. Dante, the representative poet of the Middle Ages, writes the epic of sin and salvation.

Among the sins which solicit mankind there is one which profoundly affected the Mediæval imagination, the sin against the Holy Ghost,³ the sin of sins, in that it tempted to self-destruction and thereby shut off every hope of repentance and salvation. This sin was the sin of Despair,

"*homicida animæ*, the murderer of the soul, as Austin terms it, a fearful passion, wherein

³ In the *Ayenbite of Inwit* (ed. Morris, Early Eng. Text Soc., p. 29), Despair is named as one of the six sins against the Holy Ghost.

the party oppressed thinks he can get no ease but by death and is fully resolved to offer violence unto himself."⁴

Despair is the forerunner of self-destruction. In Mediæval thought, Despair and Suicide are habitually associated. Despair is the despair of God's mercy: Burton paraphrases the Mediæval conception of it in these words:

"The terrible meditation of hell-fire and eternal punishment much torments a sinful silly soul. What's a thousand years to eternity? *Ubi moeror, ubi fletus, ubi dolor sempiternus? Mors sine morte, finis sine fine.*—What shall this unspeakable fire be that burns forever, innumerable infinite millions of years, *in omne ævum, in æternum.* O eternity!"⁵

The figure of Despair, "a female figure thrusting a dagger into her throat, and tearing her long hair—inscribed 'Desperatio mortis crudelis'," has been described by Ruskin,⁶ "By Giotto she is represented as a woman hanging herself, a fiend coming for her soul."⁷ In Dante the wood of the suicides is in the second circle of the *Inferno*. The two hounds which there pursue and rend the victims are frequently interpreted as standing for Poverty and Despair.⁸ And of course Despair, or the Abandonment of Hope is the very condition of entrance into Hell: "Lasciate ogni speranza voi ch' entrate." Adopted in continental literature and art as a favorite motive and symbol, can we trace the Vision of Despair similarly in English literature?

Chaucer's *Parson's Tale* affords us exactly the transition we want from Mediæval theology to English poetry. In his treatment of the Seven Deadly Sins in the course of his sermon on Penitence the worthy Parson enlarges upon the incidents of "*accidie*" (sullen

⁴ Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholy*, Pt. iii, sect. iv, Member ii, subsection 2. The last six subsections of Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, that strange cartulary of the Mediæval mind engrossed by the hands of a seventeenth century clerk, are taken up with a dissertation upon the sin of Despair, wherein the opinions of Zanchius, Musculus, Mersennus, Erasmus, and other doctors and theologians are copiously cited.

⁵ Reduced to its lowest terms the Mediæval conception of Despair is but the obverse of the Classical myth of Pandora, where *Hope* is the last gift left in the fatal box.

⁶ *Stones of Venice* ii, ch. viii, § lxxiii.

⁷ *Ib.*

⁸ Cf. Gifford's *Dante*, notes *ad loc.*

discontent,— punished in the fifth circle of Dante's *Inferno*):

"Now cometh wanhope, that is despeir of the mercy of God, that cometh sometyne of too muche outrageous sorrow, and sometime of too muche drede, imagininge that he hath doon so muche sinne that it wol nat availen him though he wolde repenten him and forsake sinne; thurgh which despeir or drede he abanndoneth all his herte to every maner synne, as seith Saint Augustin.⁹ Which dampnable sin, if that it continue unto his ende, it is cleped sinning in the Holy Gost." . . . "Certes, ther is noon so horrible sinne of man that it ne may in his lyf be destroyed by penitence, thurgh vertu of the passion and of the deth of Crist. Alas! what nedeth man thanne to been despeired, sith that his mercy so redy is and large? Axe and have."¹⁰

Personifications of despair are common in other Middle English poets. In Lydgate's *Assembly of the Gods* (Act ii, Scene iv, of Dr. Triggs's edition), Despair is represented as meeting Vice.¹¹ "Wanhope" appears again in Langland's *Piers Plowman*, C Passus xx 291, as despair of the mercy of God.

How does this fundamentally theological conception get transformed into a literary motive, and what are the fortunes of this motive in its treatment in later English literature? In answering this question I shall have to describe at some length two principal treatments of the theme—Spenser's Cave of Despair in canto ix, Book i, of the *Faerie Queene*, and Tennyson's *Two Voices*,—two treatments which, as I believe, show a direct transmission of motive and influence, with significant points both of agreement and of discrepancy in detail. Other but less important treatments of

⁹ Quidam enim in peccata prolapsi desperatione plus pereunt, —St. Aug. *De Natura et Gratia*, cap 35 (Skeats' note).

¹⁰ Skeat refers to the similar passage in the *Ayenbite of Inwit* 31–34.

¹¹ So in Lydgate's *Temple of Glass* (ed. Schick, Early Eng. Text Soc., ll. 636–686). The Knight, imploring Venus to be propitious to his wishes, relates the vacillations of Hope and Despair in his breast as he reflects on his lady's exalted virtue and worth. The form of argument already suggests Spenser and Tennyson. In the "Boke of Penance" appended to the *Cursor Mundi* (ed. Morris, E. E. T. Soc., p. 1474), the sinful man is exhorted not to fall into Despair:

"Thou sinful, be then war wit-all

In wreche wanhope that thou ne fall."

But (p. 1555) the sinner falls into wanhope and despair of all mercy.

the same theme will be referred to in passing.

The Cave of Despair is one of the most famous passages in the *Faerie Queene*. According to a venerable literary tradition it was this passage which first drew Raleigh's attention to Spenser. But Spenser did not first introduce into English poetry the suicide's argument of despair. How far he may have been acquainted with other earlier treatments of the theme in literature and art is uncertain. Du Bartas, whose writings Spenser knew and on whom he wrote a sonnet, introduces Despair "equipped with various instruments of Death" into his poem of *The Furies*. And in Skelton's morality of *Magnyfycence* (1530), the protagonist is delivered over to Despair who counsels suicide, and seconded by Myschefe, offers him a knife and a halter.¹² Later we note an entire play in which intense despair is the underlying motive. I refer to Marlowe's *Faustus*. And I find several passages in Chapman's plays illustrating the same idea.¹³ Spenser's chief model for the figure of Despair, however, as I shall attempt to show a little later, and as is generally believed, was a passage in the *Mirror for Magistrates*. At any rate and from whatever source he draws his materials had already been brought together for him. Deep interest in the problem of Despair and Mercy, the primary mood of awe and wonder, existed in men's minds. Mediæval theology and Mediæval art had created his situation for him. The task of Spenser was to take a traditional moral conception, exceptionally impressive in its fundamental elements, and translate that conception into the forms of poetry.

The Red Cross Knight, protagonist of humanity in Spenser's *Pilgrim's Progress* hav-

¹² Lines 2312 f. Magnyfycence succumbs to Despair without argument, but just as the knife is poised, as in Spenser, is saved by Goodhope ("repente Goodhope surripiat illi gladium").

¹³ Cf. Chapman, *Plays*, ed. Shepherd, 1874, pp. 357, 372. The former passage illustrates the traditional conception: "Enter Fronto, all ragged . . . with a halter in his hand, looking about." —After bewailing his misfortunes at some length he cries:

"Since villany, varied through all his figures,
Will put no better case on me than this,
Despair, come seize me! (He offers to hang himself.)"

ing failed to conquer joylessness (Sansjoy) in the House of Spiritual Pride, and having been rescued but recently from the bonds of worldly and material pride (Orgoglio) by Arthur, meets Sir Trevisan fleeing from "A man of hell that calls himself Despair," who had but lately beguiled to his self-destruction Sir Trevisan's companion, Sir Terwin, and had nearly persuaded Sir Trevisan to do himself to death. Great is the terror of Sir Trevisan at the idea of encountering Despair again:

"His subtil tongue like dropping honey mealt'h
Into the heart, and searcheth every vaine."

But like a true knight-errant, the Red Cross Knight insists on confronting this monster:

"'Certes,' said he, 'hence shall I never rest,
Till I that treachour's art have heard and tryde.'"

Then there follows a description of Despair and his dwelling, modeled partly after the descriptions in Sackville's *Introduction to the Mirror for Magistrates*, and presenting a picture which at once puts us into the atmosphere of Dante, or of the frescoes of Orcagna at Pisa, or of the sculptures and reliefs over the doors of some Gothic cathedral;

Ere long they come where that same wicked wight
His dwelling has, low in an hollow cave,
Far underneath a craggy clift ypyght,
Darke, doleful, dreary, like a greedy grave
On top whereof aye dwelt the ghastly owle,
Shrieking his baleful note
And all about old stockes and stubs of trees,
Whereon nor fruit, nor leaf, was ever seen,
Did hang upon the ragged rocky knees
On which had many wretches hanged beene
Whose carcasses were scattered on the greene
And thrown about the cliffs

That darksome cave they enter, where they find
That cursed man low sitting on the ground,
Musing full sadly in his sullen mind;
His griesie [grizzly] lockes, long growen, and unbound,
Disordred hong about his shoulders round,
And hid his face, through which his hollow eyne
Lookt deadly dull, and stared as astound;
His raw-bone cheekes through penurie and pine
Were shronke into his jawes, as he did never dyne.

His garment nought but many ragged clouts,
With thorns together pind and patched was,
The which his naked sides he wrapt abouts
And him beside there lay upon the gras
A dreary corse, whose life away did pas,
All wallowd in his own yet luke-warme blood,
That from his wound yet welled fresh, alas!
In which a rusty knife fast fixt stood,
And made an open passage for the gushing flood.

No detail is spared. It is a robust art that can incorporate into its substance so much of the fearful and the ugly, and still produce the impression of moral beauty as the final result. The Knight is still infected with pride. His proper function is to act. Instead thereof he longs to show his wit, and consequently is worsted. He begins by upbraiding Despair for the death of Sir Terwin. Despair replies :

"What franticke fit, quoth he, hath thus distraught
Thee, foolish man, so rash a doome to give?
What justice ever other judgement taught,
But he should dye who merites not to live?
None els to death this man despayring drive
But his own guiltie mind, deserving death. . . .

Who travailes by the wearie wandring way,
To come unto his wished home in haste,
And meetes a flood that doth his passage stay,
Is not great grace to help him over past,
Or free his feet that in the myre sticke fast? . . .
He there does now enjoy eternal rest
And happy ease, which thou dost want and crave,
And further from it daily wanderest:
What if some little payne the passage have,
That makes frayle flesh to feare the bitter wave.
Is not short payne well born that brings long ease.
And layes the soule to sleepe in quiet grave?
Sleepe after toyle, port after stormie seas,
Ease after warre, death after life, does greatly please. "

It would obviously require a mind better versed in Barbara and Celarent than the Knight's to answer off-hand such insidious sophisms as this honey-tongued man of hell advances. What a master-stroke of infernal antithesis is that

"Is not *short* pain well borne that brings *long* ease?"

Observe the subtle reminiscence of the Classic Song of the Sirens throughout this stanza, and note how the music of both reappears in the Choric song to Tennyson's *Lotos Eaters*.

The Knight begins to weaken and is so hard pressed that he can defend himself at best with the stoic commonplace of the man of action:

"The knight much wondered at his suddaine wit,
And said: 'The terme of life is limited,
Ne may a man prolong nor shorten it:
The souldier may not move from watchful sted,
Nor leave his stand until his Captaine bed;
' Who life did limit by almighty doome,'
Quoth he, 'knowes best the termes established,
And he, that points the Centonell his roome,
Doth license him depart at sound of morning droomee.

* * * * *

The longer life, I wote, the greater sin;¹⁴
The greater sin, the greater punishment;

* * * * *

Is not enough thy evil life forespent?
For he that ouce hath missed the right way,
The further he doth goe, the further he doth stray.
Then do no further go, no further stray.
But here ly downe and to thy rest betake,
Th' ill to prevent, that life enswen may;
For what hath life that may it loved make,
And gives not rather cause it to forsake?
Feare, sicknesse, age, losse, labour, sorrow, strife,
Payne, hunger, cold that makes the hart to quake;
And ever fickle fortune rageth rife:
All which, and thousands moe, do make a loathsome life.

* * * * *

Is not He just that all this doth behold
From highest heaven, and beares an equal eie?
Shall He thy sins up in his knowledge fold,
And guilty be of thy impietie?
Is not His lawe, Let every sinner die:
Die shall all flesh? What then must needs be donne,
Is it not better to doe willinglie
Than linger till the glas be all out ronne?
Death is the end of woes; die soon, O færies sonne.

This is the eternal voice of guilty conscience from the 'black depths of the heart.'¹⁵ What art is this that objectifies the very processes and moods of the soul!

"Is not his *lawe*, Let every sinner die?"

Have we not heard that voice in our century too, the voice of inflexible "law," the conscience of an age speaking through the impassible stony generalizations of a scientific philosophy? And have we not heard the strident bitter cry of the tortured conscience of the century voiced in the pessimism of a Schopenhauer or a Leopardi—

"For what hath life that may it loved make?"

Despair, the *advocatus diaboli*, the personification of the morbid Puritanical conscience, sees his advantage and pursues it, showing to the knight,

"painted in a table [picture] plaine

¹⁴ This is a favorite, Mediæval text. Thus, Sir Thos. Wilson in his Discourse of Consolation to the Countess of Suffolk (*Arte of Rhetorique*, 1553, fol. 43b);

"In wishing longer life, we wishe often tymes longer woe, longer trouble, longer folly in this world, and weye all thynges well, you shall perceive wee have small joye to wish longer life."

¹⁵ "Now conscience wakes despair,
That slumbered; wakes the bitter memory
Of what he was, what is, and what must be,
Worse; of worse deeds worse suffering must ensue."

Milton, *Par. Lost*, iv, 23-26.

The damnd ghosts that doe in torments waile
And thousand feends that do them endlesse paine
With fire and brimstone, which forever shall remaine.

The sight whereof so thoroughly him dismayd
That nought but death before his eies he saw,
And ever-burning wrath before him laid
By righteous sentence of the Almighty's law."

The Knight is now the victim of his adversary and seizes the dagger which Despair reaches out, resolved to slay himself; at the supreme moment, however, Una, the spirit of faith, rushes forward and stays his hand. She rebukes the knight as follows:

"Fie fie, faint-hearted knight. . . .
Come, come away, fraile, feeble, fleshly wight,
Ne let vaine words bewitch thy manly heart,
No divelish thoughts dismay thy constant spright;
In heavenly mercies hast thou not a part? . . .
Where justice growes, there growes eke greater grace."

Despair in despair thereupon hangs himself

"unbid, unblest,
But death he could not worke himself thereby."

"The terrible meditation of hell-fire and eternal punishment much torments a sinful silly soul," says our admirable Burton; ". . . The greatest harm of all proceeds from those thundering ministers; a most frequent cause they are of this malady. . . . Whereas, St. Bernard well adviseth, We should not meddle with the one without the other, nor speak of judgement without mercy; the one alone brings desperation, the other security! But these men are wholly for judgement; of a rigid disposition themselves, there is no mercy in them, no salvation, no balm for diseased souls; they can speak of nothing but reprobation, hell-fire, and damnation; as they did, Luke xi, 46, lade men with burdens grievous to be borne, which they themselves touch not with a finger."

PART II.

We have followed thus far the drama of Despair and Conscience in Spenser's powerful treatment. It is time to consider now his chief immediate source and his early imitators and followers. Spenser, it is probable, drew the main hints for this episode, especially for the poetical argument on self-destruction, from Higgins' version of the *Legend of Queene Cordila* in the *Mirror for Magistrates*, 1574. In Higgins' version of course we miss the shaping and life-giving imagination of the artist. Cordelia, in accordance with the easy canon of Mediæval poetry, relates her own death. To her, imprisoned by her wicked sisters, Despair, a female figure, appears in a

dream, and offers instruments of riddance from her wretched state. Cordelia takes the knife, but still doubtingly:

"So still I lay in study with myself at bate and strife,
What thing were best of both these deep extremes
untried;

Good Hope all reasons of Despair denied,
And she again replied to prove it best
To die, for still in life my woes increast."

Until finally Cordelia yields to Despair. In Higgins' treatment the argument is merely suggested, and is not generalized as with Spenser, but remains *ad hominem*. It is a soliloquy and is not dramatically objectified. Moreover, the sufferings which are suggested as arguments for despair and suicide are not spiritual sufferings, as with the Red Cross Knight, but purely material sufferings, the loss of liberty, of riches, and of power.

Among the poets commonly classed as belonging to the School of Spenser we find several imitations of this episode in Spenser, none however, significant or original in treatment, so that it will be sufficient for our purpose merely to enumerate them. The figure of Despair, modelled on Spenser's description, enters into the fifth song of the first book of Wm. Browne's *Britannia's Pastorals*.¹⁶

Again in *The Purple Island* (canto xii, stanzas 32 f.) of Phineas Fletcher, "the Spenser of this age," as he was termed by Francis Quarles, occurs the same description somewhat amplified.

Giles Fletcher (*Christ's Victory and Triumph*, Bk. ii, stanzas 23 f.) presents a very close imitation of Spenser's description, but without presenting action or argument. Todd also adduces a similar description, modelled on Spenser, from Henry More's *Song of the Soul*, Bk. i c. iii. Again, the figure of Despair in his cave occurs, with obvious parody of Spenser, in the second part of *The Return*

¹⁶ The entrance of Riot, a young prodigal, into the House of Repentance (modelled on Spenser's House of Holiness) is described. Outside of this house, by the path leading down to Hell

"in an ebon chaire

The soul's black homicide, meager Despaire,
Had his abode,"

surrounded by the instruments of death and by the horrible remains of those who, at his suggestion, had taken their own lives (Cf. *F. Q.* i, ix, 36). No argument on the subject of suicide is introduced.

from *Parnassus* iii, v, ll. 1460-1466 (Macray's edition). Similar parody occurs in the poem *O noble Festus*, in Percy's Folio MSS. iii, 272. In all these imitations it is to be noted that the figure of Despair, with his picturesque attributes of moral symbolism, is copied again and again, while the magical art of the argument between Despair and the Red Cross Knight is evidently felt to be beyond imitation or parody and is not attempted.

Satyr XI of Wither's *Abuses Stript and Whipt, or Satyricall Essayes* (Spenser Soc. Pub. 1871) is "Of Despaire." The conventional figure is here again presented:

"This is that
We call Despaire: with gastly looke he stands,
And poysons, ropes, or poyn-yards fill his hands."

The description of the state of the soul of the man who is the victim of Despair which follows might have been suggested by Spenser.

Distantly reminiscent of Spenser is the passage of high and severe argumentation in *Paradise Lost* (x, 1012 f.), between Adam and Eve over the suggestion of suicide as an escape from the woes predicted for them and their seed. It is significant that in Spenser it is Una, the representative of the *Ewig-Weibliche*, who dissuades the man, who too is the sinner, from self-destruction; while in Milton the woman carries the chief burden of sin, and the typical man argues against her suggestions of suicide.

In Bunyan's allegory Despair is naturally a prominent figure. Bunyan seems to be entirely original in his treatment, and yet the traditional conception of mediæval theology is obviously his *motif*.

"His Despair is now the Man in the Iron Cage, now a giant dwelling in Doubting Castle; the latter like Spenser's Despair, tells Christian and Hopeful in a surly manner, 'forthwith to make an end of themselves, either with knife, halter, or poison.'¹⁷

Whereupon Christian and Hopeful take counsel together, the former arguing for and the latter against suicide as the only refuge from their woes (Part i, Seventh Stage).

It is natural that during the English "classical" period a theme so romantic, introspective, and intense as that embodied in Spenser's Vision of Despair should have presented

¹⁷ Percival, Spenser's *F. Q.*, Bk. i, p. 285.

little attraction and should have practically died out from the tradition of poetry. With the revival of romanticism during the last half of the eighteenth century, however, the mood and the subject return, although there is little that shows the influence of Spenser or of the peculiar Mediæval conceptions. Dr. Joseph Wharton, it is true, has an *Ode against Despair* in the highly wrought spirit of Horace Walpole and the early imitative romanticists. Despair, again personified, is pictured as one,

"Who on that ivy-darkened ground,
Still takes at eve his silent round,
Or sits yon new-made grave beside,
Where lies a frantic suicide"
"Thus to the sullen power I spake:
Haste with thy poisoned dagger, haste,
To pierce this sorrow-laden breast!
Or lead me, at the dead of night,
To some sea-beat mountain's height,
Whence with head-long haste I'll leap
To the dark bosom of the deep"

The Ode on *The Suicide* by his brother, Dr. Thomas Wharton, is even more intense in its romanticism:

"Beckoning the wretch to torments new,
Despair forever in his view,
A spectre pale, appeared;
While as the shades of eve arose,
And brought the day's unwelcome close,
More horrible and huge her giant-shape she reared."

But with the great romantic poets of the first quarter of our century, however frequent the poetic mood of despair and dejection may be, the personal note drowns every other, and the traditional machinery no longer appears. It is so in Shelley's *Ode Written in Dejection*:

"Yet even now despair itself is mild,
Even as the winds and waters are;
I could lie down like a tired child,
And weep away the life of care
Which I have borne and yet must bear."

And it is so likewise in the *Ode to Dejection* as well as in *The Suicide's Argument* by Coleridge.¹⁸

It is in Tennyson, the great post-romantic poet, that this singularly romantic mood and motive again receive complete and artistic utterance. Many passages in his poetry dally

¹⁸ It is worth recalling that Wordsworth, too, in his formal way, takes up the argument against moral despair and inordinate grief and remorse in book iv of the *Excursion*.

with the idea.¹⁹ The poem entitled *Despair* is a bit of fierce and burning realism, voicing the resentful desperation of a suicide saved from self-destruction against his will. The dark mood of it is paralleled by the *Welt-Schmerz* and dramatic cynicism of *The Vision of Sin*, with its magnificent concluding suggestion of hope after the blackness of despair:

"Another said: 'The crime of sense became
The crime of malice, and is equal blame,'
And one: 'He had not wholly quenched his power;
A little grain of conscience made him sour.'
At last I heard a voice upon the slope
Cry to the summit, 'Is there any hope?'
To which an answer peal'd from that high land,
But in a tongue no man could understand;
And on the glimmering limit far withdrawn
God made Himself an awful rose of dawn."

But Tennyson's greatest treatment of the theme of guilt of conscience and moral despair is in that profound and subtle poem, *The Two Voices*.

The Two Voices, like the Episode of Despair in Spenser, is a poetical argument on the theme of moral desperation and of self-destruction. The original motive in each is precisely the same, but Tennyson has translated Spenser's problem into the formulæ of modern thought. Spenser objectifies, symbolizes; we have to pierce through the allegory to see how near to our own hearts is his argument. Despair and the Red Cross Knight,—what are they but the "Two Voices" of conscience. Tennyson speaks more openly; his symbolism is not covert; the illusion he attempts is purely subjective. His thought is richer, riper, more plangent. Nevertheless the two poetic moods are the same. Wide as are the differences in form and material between the two poems, there is a more significant resemblance between them, the resemblance of spiritual affinity. The *materia poetica*, as Dryden said, is as common as the *materia medica*, and it is of small importance that two poets draw upon the same material. But the kinship of mind and mood is something far more deep and subtle. There are born Platonists and born Aristotelians. Spenser and Tennyson are of the same spiritual family.

¹⁹ See for instance the *Palace of Art*, *Mariana* and the early parts of *In Memoriam*.

For the sake of the comparison with Tennyson, let us resume the argument in Spenser's episode. Despair urges:

1. Sin merits death, therefore die! This is the essence of divine law and justice.

2. Death is in itself preferable to life. It is rest and ease, and the pain of dying is short. Life is not worth living.

The Knight briefly answers:

Man is not at liberty to abandon his post. His duty holds him here.

But Despair replies with the moral sophism of the necessitarians:

3. Do the deed and it becomes God's deed,—

"Is not His deed whatever thing is done
In heaven and earth."

Death is inevitable; we cannot avoid fate.

4. Longer life means only longer sin. The clouds of glory trail all behind us and fade away as we go on. Life itself is sin. Around us ravin shrieks on ravin. The Fall of Man, Coleridge said, was the creation of the Non-Absolute.

5. Every man is a sinner, and so art thou. Why add to sin by further life?

"Death is the end of woes; die soon, O faerys' son."

Very briefly, almost sternly, in answer to all this, Una, piercing through his sophisms, calls the argument of Despair nothing but "vain words." The healthy mind recognizes this at once. Yielding to the suggestions of Despair is symptom of moral disease. Action, not words, is the proper remedy.

And now contrast Tennyson's argument:

1. "A still small voice [conscience] spake unto me
'Thou art so full of misery
Were it not better not to be?'"

2. The man answers: But life is full of wonder and beauty.

1. The Voice: But emerging from the chrysalis of this life, the next will be even fairer. The individual is petty, his scope narrow; the possibilities of the universe are infinite.

2. The Man: Still let us make what we can of this life; each individual has his chance.

1. The Voice: Life ends not with our ending; we count for so little in the universe.

2. The Man: But the spectacle of existence is worth while; merely to stand on the bank and watch the stream go by.

1. The Voice: Ah, but mere contemplation of *the Spectacle* will never make *the Mystery* clearer.

2. The Man: Duty holds us here. We are not at liberty to depart.

1. The Voice: The fear of death is cowardly. Opinion of men will not reach the right ear filled with dust.

2. The Man: Ah! but the delight of battle with our peers.

1. The Voice: A mere blind instinct. Misery alone is certain and sure.

2. The Man: But peace has come to some after strife.

1. The Voice; They had a happier nature; they did not see truth clearer.

Up to this point the debate has been agitated, even hurried. Now the spirit begins to wrestle more strenuously with itself, and dwells longer on the deeper perplexities of its thought. Hamlet's doubt occurs to the man.

2. The Man: What may follow death, what dreams may come,—this thought must give us pause.

"For I go, weak from suffering here;
Naked I go, and void of cheer;
What is it that I may not fear?"

1. The Voice: Why should we fear? Death is a sleep and a forgetting:

"Consider well," the voice replied,
"His face that two hours since hath died;
Wilt thou find passion, pain, or pride?"

2. The Man: But thou canst not show the dead are dead.

1. The Voice: Yes, for to begin implies an end.

2. The Man: But perhaps the soul has always existed.

1. The Voice: A dream! Sorrow alone is certain. Thy pain is a reality.

2. The Man:

"Whatever crazy sorrow saith,
No life that breathes with human breath
Had ever truly longed for death.
'Tis life whereof our nerves are scant,
O, life, not death, for which we pant;
More life, and fuller, that I want."

But the paroxysm of the struggle has spent itself. From now on the man is surer of himself and the better voice grows more confident and clear. Black thoughts are born of the

blackness of night. Returning day brings joy and hope. Pessimism or optimism is very much a matter of mood, of feeling, of external circumstance. Sympathy with our kind restores right feeling. We are justified in hope. Despair has not the last word. The universe is love. Let us rejoice with it inexistence:

"And forth into the fields I went
And nature's living motion lent
The pulse of hope to discontent.

* * * *

I wondered while I paced along
The woods were filled so full with song,
There seem'd no room for sense of wrong.

And all so variously wrought,
I marvell'd how the mind was brought
To anchor by one gloomy thought;

And wherefore rather I made choice
To commune with that barren voice,
Than him that said 'Rejoice! Rejoice!'"

Three strands run through all this thought, familiar to readers of Tennyson. The first is the consideration of the pettiness and helplessness of the Individual in the sum of things.

"What am I? An infant crying in the night."

The second is the consideration of the inaccessibility of ultimate truth. "'What is Truth?' said jesting Pilate." But if we are helpless and insignificant as individuals, we are still valid parts of the great Sum of Things. The impulse of universal Nature works through us also. Hence life is a duty, a trust.

The third is the consideration of immortality. Here, too, we cannot know absolutely. We are certain neither of the affirmation nor of its contrary.

Intense brooding on these three considerations induces the mood of despair. They in our generation stand for what the problem of sin and of personal salvation did in Spenser's and Milton's. Carried to the extreme analysis of conscience they all lead to the same desperation. In Tennyson the treatment is larger, the interests are broader and freer; man is more raised above himself. We are not hindered by the medium of a difficult symbolism. Philosophical poetry has at last found its full voice. But in its essence shall we say that the treatment is more poetic; that the witchery and magic and beauty of conception and execution is greater? They are

different poetic modes, that is all. A hundred years hence who shall say that the one is more effective than the other?

Note that neither poet blanches or blinks at the realities. There is no timorous art, no timorous morality, no timorous facing of truth here. Despair in Spenser, like a serpent charming a bird, insinuates his seductive suggestions till we, too, for the moment are numbed and fascinated. There is no outcome from it, as there is no outcome for his reader at the moment from the terrible metaphysical imagination of Schopenhauer. And so in Tennyson. We are led into the depths. The passionate sway of the argument back and forth is irresistible. No art appears; it is all reality. In both poets we go through the whole synthesis of doubt. It is terrible, but it is purgative and salutary. We are the stronger for it afterwards. We endure the catharsis of pity and terror.

It is to be noted, too, that in both poets the moral conclusion is the same. Despair and pessimism are moods. They are not things to be blown away by argument. In this field even wisdom entangles herself in overwiseness. "Vain words" do not help the matter. Action, sunlight, sympathy, the consideration of Divine mercy, the consideration of the solidarity of existence and our oneness with the whole,—these are the only remedies and the right remedies against despair and negation.

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CONCLUSION.

ON comparing the results obtained from the preceding examination, it is evident that the language contains, in addition to the forms of the Isle-de-France, a great number which are purely north-eastern. These dialectal differences are so numerous, and of such a character, that their use by the author of the poem seems improbable. If this supposition is correct, the present MS. is obviously a copy of an earlier one, and the question then arises, what was the dialect of the author.

Although the frequent occurrence of the

* See Jan., Feb. and April issues of current volumes of this Journal.

same characteristics is not necessarily a proof of their presence in the original MS., yet the indications that point to the French are so numerous and complete, that it must be regarded as the language used by the writer. A list of the characteristics found in the text, and belonging to the different dialects under consideration, will show more clearly the influence of each. The most important of the forms not common to the French are as follows:—

1. Retention of final *t*.
2. *a* becomes *ei*.
3. *z* becomes *s*.
4. *c + a* becomes *c(k)*.
5. *c + e, i* becomes *ch*.
6. Fall of *l* before a consonant.

During the thirteenth century, final *t* had disappeared from all the dialects except the Wallonian and eastern Picard. There are many examples of it in the text, but that final *t* belonged to the original MS. can be shown neither by the metre, nor the rhyme.

The second characteristic is not as distinctive as the first. It is common to several dialects, and may even be found in French. The rhyme shows that *ei* had the same pronunciation as the French *e*.

The reduction of *z* to *s* took place in Isle-de-France after the middle of the thirteenth century, and, although the former continued to be used, the pronunciation of both was the same. As the MS. was probably written at the close of the century, or even later, the use of *s* for *z* in the rhymes need not be regarded as a characteristic belonging especially to the Picard.

The fourth and fifth characteristics are apparently foreign to the French, but their pronunciation, which alone is of importance, is in doubt. The only positive evidence as to the pronunciation of the palatal by the author is furnished by the rhyme *toche: Antioche*, line 300. Here *c* before *a* has the sound of *ch*. A peculiarity to be observed in the use of these forms is that, instead of being distributed evenly throughout the text, nearly all of them are found crowded together within a space of less than two hundred lines, while in the rest of the MS. they are comparatively rare. This may be due to carelessness in copying, and if